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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000583

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: PRODI PRAISES GOT REFORMS IN HISTORIC VISIT

Classified by Deputy Polcouns Charles O. Blaha; reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: During a January 15-16 visit to Turkey, European Commission President Prodi praised GOT leaders for adopting extensive EU-related legislative reforms. He called for greater implementation of the reforms, and urged progress on a Cyprus solution by May. He also said the EU and GOT need to build greater public support in Europe for Turkey's EU membership. He did not indicate whether the Commission will recommend that the EU at its December Summit set a date to begin accession talks with Turkey. PM Erdogan and FM Gul accepted Prodi's views, while calling for more EU pressure on the Greek side of the Cyprus issue. They also warned Prodi that it will be difficult for the GOT to continue the reform process if the EU does not set a date for accession talks. This was the first visit to Turkey by a Commission President in 40 years. End Summary.

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Prodi Meets Top GOT Leaders, Delivers Speeches  
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2. (U) During his visit to Ankara and Istanbul Prodi met with PM Erdogan, FM Gul, President Sezer, Speaker of Parliament Arinc, and opposition Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) President Baykal. He also addressed the full Parliament and gave a speech at Bosphorus University. In his speeches, Prodi praised Turkey for adopting "far-reaching political reforms" in pursuit of EU membership. However, he also said the GOT needs to implement recent reform legislation, and called for further improvements in judicial independence and efficiency, cultural rights, anti-torture efforts, and religious freedom. In addition, he said the role of the military in politics should be further reduced, in line with EU norms. Prodi acknowledged European anxieties about Turkey's size, and urged greater efforts in EU states and Turkey to enhance mutual understanding and increase public support in Europe for Turkey's EU candidacy. To that end, he inaugurated a new EU information center in Istanbul. Prodi averred that Turkey's young, dynamic population would be an economic boon for the EU, and that Turkey's membership would promote better relations between the West and the Muslim world. He said a Cyprus settlement "would greatly facilitate" Turkey's EU aspirations. "Let me be clear," he said. "This is not a formal condition, but a political reality."

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Prodi Promises "Fair" Report  
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3. (U) Ayse Sezgin, head of the MFA Deputy Directorate General for EU Affairs, told us Prodi did not go beyond his public comments in his private meetings. Prodi told GOT leaders the European Commission recognizes the impressive progress Turkey has made toward meeting EU accession criteria. But he did not indicate whether the Commission is likely to recommend in its October progress report that the EU at the December Summit set a date to begin accession talks with Turkey. He promised that the report will be fair and objective -- an "X-ray" of the situation in Turkey. He also said the EU will not introduce new conditions or hold Turkey to a higher standard than other candidate countries. In Istanbul, a reporter tried to pin down Prodi's view of Turkey's candidacy; Prodi said he supported Turkey in the past as Italian PM, but his current role as Commission president precludes him from taking a public position.

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GOT: Date Needed to Continue Reforms  
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4. (C) Martin Dawson, head of the Political Section of the

European Commission Representation to Turkey, said Prodi went out of his way to congratulate Erdogan and Gul on the "impressive, surprising" human rights-related legislative reforms the GOT has passed in its pursuit of EU membership. Both the PM and FM appeared to understand Prodi's call for greater implementation of the reforms. They also "talked the talk" on Cyprus, telling Prodi they were committed to seeking a solution by May, while insisting that the EU put more pressure on the Greek side. Baykal, however, was defensive on Cyprus, resorting to the "same old rhetoric" about how the status quo is the best solution, causing Verheugen to roll his eyes and to remark later to Prodi that Baykal's position amounted to "stonewalling." Sema Kilicer, political officer at the European Commission Representation to Turkey, told us Erdogan and Gul warned Prodi that if the EU in December does not offer Turkey a date to begin accession negotiations, it will become politically very difficult for the GOT to continue the reform process.

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Parliament's Response Lukewarm  
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15. (C) Dawson said EU officials were surprised by the lukewarm applause Prodi receive in Parliament. One Cabinet member later told them he believed legislators were put off by Prodi's emphasis on the lack of strong public support in EU states for Turkey's membership. Kilicer, however, said some GOT officials seemed to appreciate Prodi's call for building public support in Europe, even if they are unsure of how to follow up on it. A number of MFA diplomats have raised the subject with her since the visit.

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